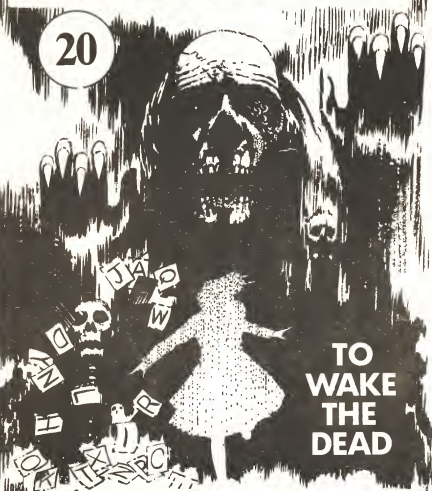


EPIC HORRORS

60p

20



TO
WAKE
THE
DEAD

RAMSEY CAMPBELL

Editorial

Hello again.

Gentle readers - listen: Your Dark Horizons file is getting lower and lower. Why aren't you doing something about it. We noticed the post after the publication of DH 19 ... and it was pathetic! Now we don't mean "pathetic" in terms of the quality of the damned work - there was no work! Yes, it dribbled in now and again, but by the forces of the Illuminati, only just! Well, we're not afraid to tell you that another couple of phases with response of that nature is going to fold the thing up for good. Don't forget - its your journal, not ours. We only stick the bloody preferable work together, then cart it off to the printers. We'll leave you to think about it ...

Okay - read on.

As for the tardy arrival of the present beast that you now hold - well, it wasn't our fault. No, it never is, we can hear you say. But its the truth. We'd finished it ages ago, but difficulties prevented it appearing earlier. And gentle readers - those difficulties were beyond our efforts. Okay? Okay.

As for the rest of the committee: Pull your fingers out - more advertising. And better advertising.

Come to think of it, the present issue is something of a collector's item. Ramsey Campbell has been very kind in allowing us to have the prologue of his new novel. Yes, new novel! And we are printing it before the thing has even seen publication - which will be later on this year. The piece is a story, complete in itself, and we think you will be intrigued by it's nastiness. Thankyou, Ramsey. Also, we have a brutal little horror, by Peter Coleborn. Lovely stuff, Pete. There is something by Mike Chinn, as well. Who the hell is he? Fascinating, was the article, which Kelvin Jones sent to us. We hope you think so too. Good one, kid. Thankyou, Terri Beckett, for trusting us, with your beautiful work. Finally, in this issue, we'd like to thank Dave Lloyd, whose devotion and enthusiasm, has made this thirty-six page effort a hell of an experience, we will never forget. This bloke is incredible!

Those of you, who think you might have something we might be interested in; typed, double-spaced on one side of the paper. Please don't forget that s.a.e. Artists: just get cracking! And how about some letters of comment. off some of you people.

Pause for thought: To tell you something - if our demands are not met, you can kiss DARK HORIZONS the l-o-n-g g-o-o-d-b-y-e. Think on it...

DARK HORIZONS



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Articles:

- THE CORRUPTION OF THE INNOCENTS.
Kelvin Jones..... 9

Fiction:

- THE HUNTER AND THE HUNTED.
Peter Coleborn..... 4
- THE PISTOL AND THE SWORD.
Mike Chinn..... 14
- TO WAKE THE DEAD. (Prologue - from the novel TO WAKE THE DEAD).
Ramsey Campbell..... 24

Poetry:

- QUESTER.
Terri Beckett..... 8
- THE WINTER GODS.
Phil Williams..... 32

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Note: Printed only when we have enough money!

The Hunter and The Hunted

peter coleborn

Yet again I am pursued. It is continually so; it never ceases. Whenever I go out, whenever I leave the safety, the solitude of my home, wherever I go, They chase me, hunt me, attack me. They are everywhere, ants swarming over spilt sugar grains. They abound, even in the daylight hours - especially then. How paradoxical: demons that forage beneath the sun. That is why I only emerge at night, to avoid Them, to hide in the dark. But still They hound me.

I remain home during the day, in my basement flat, curtains drawn tight against prying eyes. I do very little: read poetry, listen to music, but mainly I sleep. Sometimes I would aspire to artistic talents, attempt to draw, paint. You know, do something creative. But nothing ever comes of it; I've no ability, you see, and worse, no imagination. I used to listen to the radio until it fell onto the floor. So now the only sound it emits is the rattle of its wiring grating against the casing. And there is nowhere now to have it repaired, or to purchase a new set. All is totally overrun by Them.

Once I went for long walks, strolls rather, I'd go to the park, usually early in the morning; it was peaceful, quiet and tranquil. It was a glorious place to be, even in winter. Then the snow blanketed the ground, the boughs, in a rich white covering, soft, serene, beautiful. Or the stark trees would stand firm, impressive, proud, seemingly imbibing in me some of their majestic strength. In the spring and summer the park came alive with a riot of colours.

bright, almost gaudy, vying for the attention of a bee or an equally brilliantly adorned butterfly, or the appreciative gaze from an eye, my eye. In autumn the colours became subdued, mellow, relaxing, instilling a restfulness on my brain. Oh, I loved the park, my Park! I can still see its splendour in my dreams. But now I can visit it only at night, black shapes barely discernable against a dark, melancholic background.

Then They began to appear, emerging insidiously, from some primordial nether region, a hell where They were spawned. At first They appeared singly, then in pairs, then small groups. I thought that I might have been mad, experiencing weird delusions, or that a dream, more a nightmare persisted in its mind-bending course. I hoped that my sanity would return, or that the nightmare would end, and that I would awake. But whatever, I avoided Them as one would a rat possessed of the plague. I hid from Their hypnotic stare behind trees, hedges, parked vehicles, anything, praying that the dream, the delusion would cease, or that They would depart, allowing the Earth to recover from Their tainted touch. False hope! God, I knew it was no dream or hallucination; and to retain what sanity remained I had to hide, to live secretly, but in safety.

I recall the last time I walked beneath the sun. I went to the park where Their numbers were usually few, where I could readily avoid Them. I had resolved to help my fellow men, or at least to warn them, to break through the glamour that surely possessed them; I had to show them the truth. It was the only way, I thought, that mankind could rise up against Them and expel Them....

There were none of the creatures about that day, a fact that gave me immense relief and encouragement. I doubt if I could have achieved what little I did had I witnessed Their evil countenances. I wasn't brave; my resolve may

have dissipated like smoke in the breeze.

There was a woman pushing a pram slowly through the park alongside brilliant embankments of marigolds, poppies, fuchsias and paeonies. The blooms gave no indication of the horror that was about to occur. She seemed enchanted, almost dazed; I thought, at first, that she was drinking in the vivid display of flowers, the sweet melody of song-birds.

I came upon her unawares; I must have startled her. She stared blankly at me, seemingly not hearing a word of my warning; maybe she didn't understand me, didn't appreciate the urgency, the horror of the situation. I remember shouting at her, yelling, waving my arms about frantically. I grasped her shoulders, shook her. Long auburn hair flew around her head, catching the sun's rays in its gossamer threads. A look of terror appeared on her face giving me hope, informing me that my message was getting through, awakening her consciousness to the heinous Beings that stalked the Earth.

Then I happened to glance within the pram. My cries of exhilaration, of success, ceased, to be transformed into screams of fear. For there lay one of Them, Its deep black eyes glaring at me from a bloated head garnished with palid reptilian scales. Spittle frothed at Its gaping, inanely grinning mouth.

My mind was burning with fright, sheer terror. I knew that I should escape but I couldn't leave the woman in Its power. My movements became agitated, my thoughts frantic, as I desperately sought to solve the dilemma. In my frenzy I pushed the carriage over. The Thing screamed some incomprehensible, unhuman noise, becoming muted in the gurgling sound of It flowing out onto the path, a viscid gel of red gore.

But I had gotten through to her. I'm sure I did. She saw It lying amaeoid like before her. She stood rigid, an expression of incredulity on her face. Suddenly she screamed, arms flying up to cover her eyes, to conceal the sight. I had never heard such a cry of terror, of dread before. I tried to drag her away, to

comfort her, to give encouragement, but she kept pushing me, kicking and thumping. I suppose the shock of seeing the broiling mess was too much for her obviously weakened mind.

Then I saw two more of the Creatures, monstrous shapes running, no, more flopping across the lawn towards us. I tried, God! I tried to pull the woman away, to lead her to safety, but I could not penetrate her incessant ululations. And matching her wailing came the raucous cacophony from the approaching obscenities.

I could do no more. I ran until I would drop then ran some more. Behind me I heard the unintelligible shriekings of the following monsters. I ran like an automaton, without direction, just one thought: to escape. Somehow I drew away from my pursuers, losing them in the labyrinth of parked traffic and serpentine streets. Yes, that was the first time I was the hunted. It was also my final excursion beneath the sun.

I don't recall my return to the flat. I only remember waking on the sofa, shivering and sweating, hot then cold. The carpet, the cushions, my clothes were thick with vomit, tainting the air with its own nauseating stench. I emptied my guts once more. Later I drank a little water. I couldn't face any food; I haven't eaten since.

I braved the outside several nights later, choosing the darkest hour when the streets would be dark and lonely, offering a degree of safety. I had to go out that night, just as I have to every night since. I know not why except that I experience a compulsion, which if not obeyed develops into an agonising, excruciating pain in my chest, my stomach, my head. All I know is that I would rather face the Demons of the night than suffering the torment of ignoring that strange dictation, that obligation to walk beneath the moon and stars.

I would stare out of the window, peering through the merest gap between the curtains. When assured of complete solitude I would leave silently via the back door, into a yard, as black as the ocean's depths. Somehow I would get to the park; I always go there; I remember. But in-

variably I would meet Them, and inevitably I would be pursued. Just like that first time. Besides that I recall nothing. Tonight is no exception. It is dark and quiet, ideal for a sojourn under the stars. My emaciated figure enables me to elude the few Creatures I chance upon, to hide in the smallest openings, the barest of recesses. Yet again I am the hunted....

I crept along the narrow road, heading, as always, towards the park. Yes, I recollect my stealthy progress now, but then what? A sound, an incoherent babbling from ahead, approaching me. I ducked into an alley, scarcely wide enough for my thin frame. My stomach tightened, muscles squeezing intestines. Thank God that I contained nothing to vomit, but nevertheless, as Their stench neared, I still managed to retch, tasting bile in my dry, constricted throat. My head reverberated with Their discordant cackling. I pushed deeper into the alley. My hand grasped something: a long, coarsely cut wooden stake from a pile of them leaning on a fence in obvious disrepair. There were two of the Creatures. They drew level with me then passed on. I let out a sigh of relief, moved forward to the street. I stood watching Them, marking Their progress. I failed to hear the third One approaching along the road, behind me.

It uttered something completely unintelligible. I whirled around, my heart thumping violently, my throat again tightening. I gazed upon the awful Abomination; Its huge, misshapen head sprouting coarse tufts of black bristles from a gnarled, warty hide; numerous sores revealed patches of extrusive pus. The eyes luminesced an evil, alien green, transfixing me, holding me immobile. It too halted but raised its voice as if calling to Its fellow Creatures. I dimly realised that I still held the wooden stake. Reassurance spread up my arm into my shoulders, my body, freeing me from Its spell. I screamed, and again, and again, stripping my lungs of oxygen. I leapt forward swinging the stake; I felt it smashing into the Things swollen head; I heard the music of crunching bones. Its ichor sprayed out in an evanescent fountain. It fell into a gruesome pool, blood

and brains flowing from Its cloven skull. And from somewhere deep within me I felt an inexplicable hunger developing.

Again I bellowed, in victory or in horror at what lay before me, I am unsure. Rapidly my senses returned. The two who passed me earlier raced back, running with a rolling, lumberous gait. I ran off down the road, not caring in what direction I fled. I ran, howling to the moon, the stars, the pitch, black deep space above me. Yes! Yes, I now remember. I am pursued once again.

* * * * *

A scream ripped the taciturn night, followed by another, and a third. They turned round to stare back along their route. It was too dark to see clearly; the street lamps were few and far between. They began to walk towards the disturbance. A shape was seen, pale, ghostly, looming over a shorter man, its arms raised baring something long, menacing in its grasp. Then the arm descended, the stick making contact with the smaller man's head. Even at that distance they heard the crunching of bones. The victim crumbled into a heap at his assailant's feet. Once again a scream ruptured the night.

They raced down the street, determination a mask on their faces, shouting, yelling, cursing. They have him now, they thought. The murdering bastard; they're not going to let him escape. There have been too many killings, murders of an undescribably vile, heinous nature. No, they are not going to allow his escape this time. They increased their pace. The attacker turned to run from them, but they were gaining, closing. Then the hunted passed through the bell of illumination offered by a faintly glowing street lamp. And they saw him clearly then, silhouetted against his surroundings.

They faltered in their chase, their courage, their determination suddenly departing. The hunted disappeared into the impenetrable gloom offered by a myriad of entranceways and junctions. The hunt, however, had terminated. The two men retreated solemnly back to the dead man, lying in his congealing blood. One of them knelt, touching the corpse's cheeks, as if checking its substant-



NMF 79

iality.

The other gained his voice:

"George...."

"Yes, Mike, I saw. I saw."

Yes, they both witnessed it.

George tasted bile, felt a narrowing of his throat. He gulped frantically for air as he recalled the skeletal lich, its cadaverous appearance rendered more appalling by the white bones exposed by its decaying flesh. George, brave George burned with fear as he remembered the pale, naked ghoul disappearing into the obsidian night.

His friend saw a creature of legend, of myth; a demon of night. A long dark cloak flapped from narrow shoulders, pale hair cascading over its high collar. He recollected its flaming eyes, bright coals in an anemic, grinning mien, its ivory fangs dripping fresh blood. Mike's heart beat erratically, almost ceasing in its life-giving rhythm. A sharp pain stabbed, paradoxically, at his breast. The escaping thing seemed to melt into invisibility; from the shadows he saw a bat winging its way upward, scr-

eeching mockingly.

* * * * *

I cease running to collapse against a garage door, panting, labouring for breath. I almost faint with exhaustion. But I am safe now; They have stopped in Their pursuit, ceased Their incessant wailing. My head begins to clear, my lungs regain air. Eventually I deem it prudent to return home, not wishing for a repeat performance.

Already the memory is fogging, My limbs are aching with exertion, my chest aches with each inhalation of the cold night air. Indeed, the chase took much out of me. And now the reason for the hunt is gone, lost in the myriad pathways of my brain. I dimly recollect a hunger but readily shrug that off. Afterall, I haven't eaten for weeks, ever since that fateful day I lost my appetite.

No; I shall awake later in my flat; aware only of a hunt and I, as always, the prey.



QUESTER

Though high the Iron Mountains loom,
Peaked with the guardian turrets of Despair,
We shall win through - beyond this place of gloom
Are meadows, woodlands, lawns and orchards fair.
A gentle land, far from these barren fells
Where nothing grows beneath the frowning moon and bloody sky.
This riven land so dark with spells
Can never see another dawn - its hour is soon -
But we shall seek a newer sunrise, brighter birth
Of all strive for, space to breath and grow,
A place where every virtue, courage, love and mirth
Combine - to form a demi-paradise. Eden in Embryo.

terri beckett

Kelvin Jones

The Corruption of The Innocents

Bram Stoker's Dracula was published in 1897, Henry James' The Turn of the Screw in 1898. Both are remarkable contributions to the late 19th century gothic literature, and although different in many ways, both novels celebrate the theme of the corruption of innocence in a convincing and terrifying way.

In Dracula, the innocents are Jonathan Harker and the women, Mina and Lucy. In James' tale it is the children. In both stories the victims are seduced both physically and mentally by a phantom possessed of considerable strength - a vampire who controls through his eroticism. Stoker's Dracula is a more tangible phantom. Peter Quint, in The Turn of the Screw, is less evident but equally powerful. Through his influence on the Governess, who is also the narrator, he brings about the destruction of the children and the death of the boy. Miles. In Dracula Van Helsing would have us believe that Dracula succeeds like the common cold. He is an infection that spreads by physical contact. But, in fact, his influence is as much psychological. He hypnotises his victims into a state of passivity, so that they are compliant to the master's wishes.

Both these works represent a late flowering of the theme that was to preoccupy the exponents of the gothic novel. The famous forerunner of this type was Mathew Lewis's The Monk in which the sexual excesses of the main character so offended The Society for the Suppression of Vice that they succeeded in having it seized by the authorities. In Lewis's novel, the chief horror lies in the seduction and incarceration of a young nun. The book was an instant success and survived its attempted censorship. While it owed much of its atmosphere to the mysterious landscapes of Mrs. Radcliffe, its novelty lay in the fascination of its principal character, the anti-hero friar who is obsessed by lust and devilry and corrupts all with whom he comes into contact.

Monk Lewis's terror-romance initiated into the fiction of the 19th century the dynamic action-initiating villain who like Milton's Satan is a fallen angel, an outcast of humanity doomed to remain apart from his fellow human-beings and yet

retain a curious hold over them.

There were to be many others. The first to follow was Lord Ruthven, the satanic hero of Polidori's story, The Vampire. First published in 1819 under Lord Byron's name (significantly!) it had the distinction of being the first full length vampire story in English. The story (which is remarkably well-constructed) tells of the sudden appearance of Lord Ruthven at a London party. He befriends a young man called Aubrey over whom he exerts a fatal fascination. Aubrey attempts to thwart Ruthven, whose exploitation of the fair sex is without shame, but fails in the attempt, his own sister falling foul of the vampire. Ruthven, like the Ancient Mariner, and Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, fated to remain apart from the common herd.

"He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness resided. Those who felt this sensation of awe could not explain whence it arose: some attribute it to the dead grey eye, which fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate... but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin...."

Ruthven's attraction, like Byron's among the young ladies of society, is wholly

erotic. We are told later on that "many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions" and "he had the reputation of a winning tongue".

Aubrey is the prototype of Jonathan Harker: young, impressionable, gullible, he soon falls victim to the artful Ruthven and it is noteworthy that his mental submission to the vampire is accompanied by a physical decline.

He had become emaciated, his eyes had attained a glossy lustre

Aubrey exists in a curious symbiosis with Lord Ruthven. He cannot function without him and only show signs of improvement on his return from Greece. In The Vampire it is the innocent who suffer. Aubrey's sister suffers death because Aubrey himself has lost the power to control his own destiny and Aubrey suffers the loss of his identity through a physical and mental debilitation. But although we can blame much of this on Ruthven, it is also true that much of the tragedy arises from Aubrey's passive response to those around him. Even his infatuation with the Greek girl, Ianthe, leads nowhere. Ruthven succeeds precisely because he controls his own destiny.

Perhaps the most popular predecessor of Dracula was Thomas Preskett Prest's Varney The Vampire. Prest was a prolific writer of penny dreadfuls and melodramas and immensely popular with his reading public. In Varney there is none of the sophisticated. Varney is a straightforward ghoul whose appetites are frankly gruesome. "What is it?", writes Prest of his hero. "What made it look so hideous - so unlike an inhabitant of the Earth, and yet to be on it?", To the reader of Dracula, Varney is a fascinating work. It contains all the eroticism of Stoker's novel but it is blatantly and garishly revealed to us. Prest's victim's are voluptuous and wholly feminine.

"The bed in that old chamber is occupied. A creature formed in all fashions of loveliness lies in a half sleep upon that ancient couch - a girl young and beautiful as a spring morning. Her long hair has escaped confinement and streams over ... the bedstead ... one arm is over her head ... a neck and a bosom that would have formed a study for the rarest sculptor that ever Providence gave genius to. were half disclosed

Their attacker (his teeth "projec-

ting like those of some wild animal") is wholly bestial. In fact the entire scene from which this passage is derived reads much more like a description of rape than of a vampire at his repast (but as we shall see, the two acts are not entirely incompatible).

The bedclothes fell in a heap by the side of the bed. She was dragged by her long silken hair completely on to it again. Her beautiful rounded limbs quivered ... The glossy, horrible eyes ran over that angelic form with a hideous satisfaction - horrible frofation. He drags her head to the bed's edge. He forces it back by the long hair with a plunge he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth - a rush of blood, and a hideous sucking noise follows

The psycho-analytically inclined would make much of a passage like this. Sucking and biting are both the province of the vampire. As Havelock Ellis pointed out, "both lead to the complete physical and psychic satisfaction of both persons involved." In the unconscious, the mouth and vagina are frequently identified. "The swollen breast corresponds to the erect penis, the avid humid mouth of the child, to the palpitating, humid vagina." Note, too, the complete subservience of the female victim to the vampire. Despite the ferocity of his attack, all she does is to scream, nothing more.

In Dracula, the theme of innocence corrupted reaches its most elaborate form. Here not only are the women hypnotised into submission but even Jonathan Harker himself falls prey to a sexual enticement. Unlike Prest, the passage has a power and subtlety of description which rings true to the reader. Harker, entering a room in the castle which has been expressly forbidden to him, finds he is overcome by a strange languor. Three young women approach him:

I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, for though the moonlight was behind them, they threw no shadow on the floor. They came close to me, and looked at me for some time, and then whispered together All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips I felt in my heart a wicked burning desire that they would kiss me



with those red lips They whispered together, and then they all three laughed it was like the intolerable tingling sweetness of water glasses when played on by a running hand. The fair girl shook her head coquettishly, and the other two urged her on. One said:

"Go on! You are first, and we shall follow; yours is the right to begin." The other added:

"He is young and strong. There are kisses for us all!"

I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply glowing. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling

and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually arched her lips like an animal I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited - waited with beating heart

The experience is both "thrilling" and "repulsive" - thrilling because the recipient anticipates the sexual contact, repulsive because the vampire imparts is the kiss of the cannibal. Since the impulse to bite is the origin of the kiss, it is one stage further to substitute the bite for the kiss. As Ornella de Volta points out, (1) "cannibalism and corpse-eating have a profound undenyng basis of eroticism."

Despite the differences in style, the distinction between Prest's and Stoker's vampires and their victims is a fine one. The vampire does not attack his prey; he seduces, and in each case, there is a de-

ree of compliance on the part of the victim. The pleasure/repulsion principle is common to both. If we examine the account of Lucy Westenra's first encounter with Dracula, this point is reinforced.

"....I have a vague memory of something long and dark with red eyes; just as we saw in the sunset and something very sweet and bitter all around me at once; and then I seemed sinking into deep green water, and there was a singing in my ears and then everything seemed passing away from me ... and then there was a sort of agonising feeling, as if I were in an earthquake"

As so often described elsewhere, the experience is not unlike that of dying. But the sense of the passing away of the material world accompanied by "an agonising feeling" could equally represent the sensation of orgasm. This should not surprise us, for the two have often been equated. There is a latent danger in the act of coition, the feeling that one is surrendering oneself wholly to another. "For this reason", noted Freud, "prostration after complete sexual satisfaction resembles death, and in inferior forms of life procreation is immediately followed by death". (2) Lest the reader regard this as idle fantasy, he would do well to examine the "baptism by blood passage" in the novel. Van Helsing and Quincey, it will be remembered, discover the Count in the process of initiating Mina with his own blood.

"With his left hand he held ... (her) hands ... his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck forcing her face down on his bosom ... The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink"

Mother and child, the latter suckling at the former's breasts. This is the analogy Bram Stoker is describing and it has a direct parallel with the sexual act. "In both cases," says Ellis "we may observe the phenomenon of detumescence in an organ which has momentarily swelled and which through the expulsion of a precious liquid, ... leads (to satisfaction)."

One could pinpoint many passages in the novel which demonstrate the extraordinary lengths to which Stoker had gone in his development of the vampiric theme of the seduction of the innocent. But it is unnec-

essary to do so. What shocked readers of the period and yet compelled them to the work was its mixture of eroticism and terror. As we have seen, the two are interdependent and it is from this that the book derives its main strength.

When we examine The Turn of the Screw we discover a writer who has taken very similar subject-matter and subjected it to a much greater obliqueness. Perhaps this has much to do with Henry James's curious style. The parallels with Dracula are fairly obvious. As has been mentioned, the seduction of the two children occurs through the spirit of Peter Quint who, although a phantom, appears to the governess on numerous occasions. The description of Quint is traditionally Byronic. Readers of Dracula will find the resemblances striking:

"He has red hair, very red, close curling, and a pale face, long in shape, with straight, good features and little, rather queer whiskers that are as red as his hair. His eyebrows are somehow darker; they look particularly arched His eyes are sharp, strange - awfully; but I only know clearly that they're rather small and very fixed. His mouth's wide and his lips are thin

Dracula himself is described by Harker as having a "face ... strong ... aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples ... eyebrows massive, almost meeting over the nose ... The mouth ... fixed and ... cruel-looking ... The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor." Like Dracula, too, Quint possesses the ability to appear at a distance from the observer, bringing about a peculiar hush as he does so.

"The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky and the friendly hour lost, for the minute, all its voice.",

James writes. This conjunction of beauty and terror is most graphically conveyed in the early part of Dracula when Harker sees Dracula's form emerging, lizard-like, from one of the castle windows, to scale the wall beneath:

In the soft light the distant hills became melted, and the shadows in the valleys and gorges of velvety blackness. The mere beauty seemed to cheer me ... As I leaned from the window my eye was caught by something moving a story below me ... What I saw was the Count's head ... I did not see the face, but I knew the man

by the neck and the movement of the back and arms ... I saw the whole man slowly emerge ... and begin to crawl down the castle wall ... face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings ...

This vision of awfulness arises from tranquility to appal us, and it is precisely because the figure is seen from a distance that it appears both unreal and convincing. The difference is that James keeps his phantom at a distance (the Governess never makes direct contact) whereas Bram Stoker allows us to encounter him personally. Nevertheless, the effect is similar. We are aware in The Turn of the Screw of the insidious influence of Quint and his mistress on both the governess and the children in her charge - an effect which reduces the governess to the state of paranoia. As in Dracula, the influence of the vampiric personality is essentially erotic. There is an unnatural relationship between the governess and the children in her charge. It is as if the governess, like the spirits that threaten the children, wishes to possess them. The closing passage of the novel provides unnerving proof of how far the governess has become a victim to the couple's evil influences.

"What does (Quint) matter now, my own? What will he ever matter? I have you," I launched at the beast, "but he has lost you for ever!" Then, for the demonstration of my work, "There, there," I said to Miles. But he had already jerked straight round, stared, glared again, and seen but the quiet day ..."

Miles dies, seeing no phantom. It is the governess who has become possessed. We are left wondering if it is she who has brought about his destruction.

What is not oblique in James' masterpiece is the omnipresent sense of evil that runs through Ely and its inhabitants like a scarlet thread. Perhaps one of the most dramatic moments occurs when the governess assuming the night visitor on the lawn before the house to be Quint, looks down from a window of an empty chamber to behold the boy Miles.

"The moon made this night extraordi-

narily penetrable and showed me on the lawn a person ... who stood there motionless and as if fascinated, looking up to where I had appeared - looking, that is, not so much straight at me as at something that was apparently above me... There was a person on the tower ... But ... the presence on the lawn - I felt sick as I made it out - was poor little Miles himself."

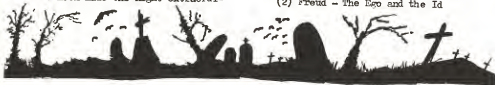
The realisation, like Jonathan Harker's, is of a level of distortion that is beyond the worst expectations of the observer. For Harker it is the vision of the inhuman clothed in human form, emerging from its cocoon. For the governess it is the stark that Miles has become the predator and has now assumed control of Ely, through the corruption of the past. And corruption, like death itself, has a way of insinuating itself into the fabric of our lives.

"You like them ... to be naughty? ... So do I!... But not to the degree to contaminate -"
"To contaminate?" - my big word left her at a loss. I explained it. "To corrupt." She stared, taking my meaning in, but it produced in her an odd laugh. "Are you afraid he'll corrupt you?"

This is precisely what the governess fears and what finally emerges as the ultimate nightmare.

In Dracula, the process is similar. The corruption spreads through the unit of the family but then proceeds further to threaten the whole of the metropolis. It is only after a tough battle, conducted by Van Helsing, that the Count is vanquished and even then it is a close thing. The Count symbolises, nay, is corruption itself. He is the undead, the threat to the forces of consciousness, attacking us at night through his erotic power. Quincey Morris's dying words contain within them the key to the entire novel: "Now God be thanked that all has not been in vain! See! The snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!" Whereas James' novel ends on a note of pessimism, Stoker's Dracula renews our faith in the power of the ego over the dark forces of unreason. With the death Dracula purity and innocence are once more restored.

- (1) The Vampire
- (2) Freud - The Ego and the Id



THE PISTOL AND THE SWORD

by mike chinn

Kelyon the draper looked up sharply as his keen ears picked up the sounds of spurs and hooves on the cobbled street. He stared about uneasily, for riders were rare in Hameln in these troubled days - and all strangers were to be treated with care.

He glanced up the cobbled main road, lined with half-timbered and gabled houses - and started as his eyes did not find the soldier they had expected; but a most unusual figure.

It was a tall man, dressed in an odd mixture of worn rags and expensive clothes. On his head was a deep-brown hat with a silken sweatband into which was thrust a long white feather; the hat's wide brim was pulled low over the man's face, leaving his travel-stained features in shadow. An elegantly cut beige greatcoat hung to below his knees, and beneath this were a black velvet doublet, plain collarless cream shirt, a thick red cravat knotted around his throat, tightly-tailored trows of brown, and black thigh boots with the tops turned down to just above the knee. As the skirts of his coat were blown by the flickle warm breeze, Kelyon saw that the stranger wore a slim and beautifully-finished rapier slung from a belt over his right shoulder; whilst on his right hip, the draper spied a holstered pistol.

The horse the man rode was a magnificent black stallion. It wore no decoration, save a gorgeous tall saddle, and a scabbarded wheel-lock carbine on its flank.

The stranger halted as he came abreast Kelyon and turned his cold blue eyes towards him. He pushed back his hat and stared for long moments - and then he spoke softly in a cultured, but heavily-accented voice.

"This is the town of Hameln, one of the chief garrison towns of Blendels, is it not?"

"Yes, milor", nodded the draper.

"Ruled ever by Captain Jeynes Vyssmör, lackey of Bresniv Laneenovitch?"

Kelyon paled. "If you please, milor", it isn't wise to speak thus - the Emperor Bresniv I, if you please."

The others tanned features took on a look of contempt. "Laneenovitch was born a peasant and shall die like one!" The draper noted how the man's gloved left hand tightened on the basket hilt of his rapier.

"Is there a place where I can stable my horse and refresh myself here?"

Kelyon nodded and pointed to a half-timbered inn a little further down the street. "The Silver Dragon has stables and an excellent beard, milor".

The other pursed his lips, nodded and, save for the tinkle of spurs, led his horse towards the hostel in silence.

* * * *

He sat aloof in the tavern, drinking ohé poured from a tall, thin-necked pot. Without his broad hat his hair revealed itself to be sandy brown, cut to just below his ears and brushed back. His features were finely chisled and showed the signs of soft living and aristocracy - but the outdoors, tanned skin and several days growth of tawny whiskers removed any suggestion of decadence. There was also a trace of cruelty about his unsmiling mouth and cold blue eyes. He clutched a long-stemmed pipe in the side of his mouth and puffed at it absently.

Few people paid him any attention. Although not a common sight in these parts, drifters were to be expected in such times as the self-

styled Emperor Bresniv swallowed more and more of the continent of Aysan. If the stranger was an aristocrat, it was no more surprising.

A soldier entered the inn suddenly. He caused a small wave of interest, for he was a gaudily dressed officer of the Blendaim Guard, obviously not unknown to the common people. He spotted the stranger and crossed the sawdusted floor, oblivious to the guarded hostile glances, to sit opposite him. The cold eyes lifted slowly and stared a moment before the stranger removed his pipe and spoke.

"Captain Jeynes Vyssmôr, I believe? You have had a most distinguished career, sir - at home and abroad."

Vyssmôr bowed in his seat. "I'm flattered that you've heard of me, sir - and I believe that you are looking for me. Yet I can't say that we've met..."

"Have some ohé," said the other quietly, pouring out a cup and pushing it towards the captain.

"I am Jemas Talarth, Comte of Sed'Deiock."

"Sed'Deiock?" Vyssmôr's eyebrows lifted as he took a sip from the cup. "Then you're from Trolsaus?"

"I am."

"Then, what are you doing here? That island is not yet part of the empire."

Talarth remained silent for many seconds. Then he put down his cup and spoke.

"Three years ago, the Empire came to Trolsaus - to Sed'Deiock. Why, I cannot say for, as you remarked, Trolsaus is not part of your Empire; but they came regardless, with chaos in their wake. Wilfully, they raped and destroyed - until the Seven sent troops southwards - and then they flew fearfully. But before they left, these troops had destroyed one family - the one that had the power to stop them."

"They raped and slew the mother and two daughters, crucified the father and cut the throat of the son. The family, of course, was that of the Comte and Comtesse vir Sed'Deiock."

Talarth pulled down his high oravat with his left hand and revealed a sickening pink scar running across his throat. Vyssmôr stiffened and grabbed for his sword, even as there was a thunderous roar and belch of smoke. Fragments flew off

the edge of the table, scattering against the captain as he fell to the floor with a scream, his right arm shattered beyond recognition.

Talarth stood, moving his right hand from under the table, still holding his smoking pistol. He leveled the long barrel at the prone figure, cocking the hammer and so turning a pre-loaded chamber.

"A sorcerer kept me alive - one of The Seven," continued Talarth. "And he told me who had led that raid on Sed'Deiock. There was Rodikhaal Langën, Stanislaw Mhôteyn, Phyrin Menthor, Tyrnis Menthor, Mournah Setaen, and, of course, you, Vyssmôr."

He squeezed the trigger, and the hammer struck with a flash.

* * *

"Menthor!"

The captain spun around, knocking half-empty beer mugs to the floor. The tavern was suddenly empty of sound as customers turned to watch the soldier uncertainly stand and face the grotesqued figure silhouetted against the smalt open doorway.

"Talarth?" asked Menthor in an evercontrolled voice. "How did you find me?"

The other stepped forward, into the tavern's light - his expensive but plain clothes contrasting sharply with the gaudy doublet, hose, bell-sleeved shirt, thigh-boots and plumed hat draped around the soldier. He raised his pistol and held it steady.

"Priests of Visaana seem most eager to damn a heretic Corunon - especially when a little persuasion is used. Kolegn - indeed, any town of Blendaim - would seem dangerous to a Mongarlsan."

"And Trolsaus murderers, Comte," snarled the other. "I've prepared well for this moment." Four musketeers pushed through the crowd, resplendent in leather jerkins, hese and conical helms. Each held a wheel-lock musket primed, cocked and aimed at Talarth's heart.

The Comte laughed shortly and cruelly. "And I had expected no less, killer." He dropped to one knee suddenly, firing. Three times more he cocked and fired, before once again rising to his feet - four corpses lay on the sawdusted floor. He looked at Menthor and at his four-shot pistol, and sneered.

With a fluid motion he holstered his flintlock and drew his rapier, a long slim blade of Trelaus steel.

"This gives you a chance that you do not fairly deserve. On guard."

Menthor unbuckled his baldric and tossed it aside as he drew his own blade. "You're skilled with a fire-arm, Comte - yet I am famed for my speed with a blade."

"Scarcely deserved, no doubt," Talarth stamped his foot and thrust quickly. Menthor parried easily, returning the thrust. For a minute they scurried across the space anxious spectators had left them, gauging each others strength, skill and speed. The Comte suddenly thrust at the other's eyes, his neck, torso, arm and groin. Menthor parried each successfully, but now he knew, as well as Talarth, that the soldier could never match the Comte's speed. It was simply a matter of minutes more before a fatal wound would be inflicted.

Menthor began to feint, desperate to gain himself time in which to think. He switched all his efforts to attack, slashing wildly as he feigned panic; but his final thrust was well calculated. Seemingly at the last moment, Talarth knocked the point away from his throat.

Yet despite his clever tricks and flamboyant style, the soldier's end came quickly and inevitably. Talarth fainted for his eyes; as Menthor's blade was rising to parry, the Comte whirled his sword aside and slashed the other's sword arm from wrist to elbow.

Menthor screamed and fell to his knees, rapier clattering to the floor. He looked up imploringly as Talarth's blade proked his throat.

"No quarter," said the Comte softly, yet with chilling menace.

"But at least Mhôteyn is warned and on his way to Mosoar to warn the rest." There was a quiet triumph in his voice.

"Mhôteyn!" Talarth's blade slit into Menthor's chin. "Where is he?"

"Free. He called into Kolegn yesterday to tell me that Bresniv wants to see all his officers for talks preparatory to his invasion of Thall. Mhôteyn will have heard of this duel and be safely on his way by now."

Talarth's face twisted into a

snarl, "No quarter - nor easy death."

He stuck his sword upright into the floor with a challenging glance at the nervous onlookers. Slowly, he pulled a needle-bladed dagger from his doublet and bent towards a vainly struggling Menthor.

After half a day's hard ride Talarth stood on a rise of ground amongst the steppes that flowed from Blendim into northern Lativ. In the distance he saw the riding figure of Stanislaw Mhôteyn, jogging slowly through the tall grass. The Comte pulled the one and a third metres long wheel-lock carbine from the holster of his stallion's flank and cocked the mechanism. He sighted down the octagonal barrel and stared for long moments at the shape outlined in the sight.

Then, with an unconscious half-smile, he lowered the gun, uncocking it. Mhôteyn was out of range, and he could never be ambushed or attacked from behind in the flat lands ahead.

Talarth resheathed the carbine and mounted quickly. He peered at the disappearing figure as the sun began to sink, casting the Comte's shadow hugely behind him. He pulled his pipe out of his cloak and grasped it in his teeth. Still watching the riding man he struck a match and lit the pipe.

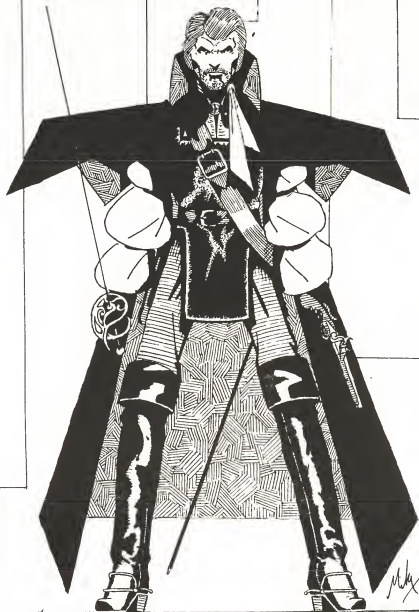
"There will be another time for us, Field-Commander Stanislaw Mhôteyn," he said through clenched teeth. "Until then...."

He saluted mockingly and, pulling his hat lower across his face, guided his horse due south towards Karlmain.

* * * *

Castle Vyrrich had stood for many centuries, guardian of the northern borders of Karlmain. Long before Bresniv Laneenovitch had spurred the Royal Mongarlan Armies into revolt against their masters and ground most of the Aysan land mass under his heel, had Vyrrich lain upon the gentle grassy slopes in complacent slumbers. And many said that even when the newly-named Laneenovitch Empire was forgotten myth, Vyrrich would still hold fast.

Night had fallen two hours past as measured by the Gothic olook-tower in the castle's keep. A thin crescent moon faintly illuminated the tall walls as a furtive silho-



ette flitted from shade to shadow. It seemed to be a man, dressed in a long coat and a wide brimmed hat. Moonlight glittered occasionally on the hilt of a sword as he dodged erratically through the slanting shadow and greenly-glowing patches of light.

Eventually, the figure plunged into the blackness of an open door at the base of a tall tower close to the fortress's outer wall. He began to climb the winding spiral stairway with a stealth and silence that was almost magical - especially as his silver-chased spurs were fastened unuffled to his tall boots. As he passed slit windows, flashing moonlight lit a bobbing feather in his hat, and grim features below the brim.

Shortly, he reached the summit of the tiring stairs and was stopped by an oaken door. Drawing his slim rapier, he stepped back a pace - and kicked the door open. Scarcely had the wood reached the limit of its swing before he had leapt through the doorway, and into a coolly furnished room lit by a blazing log fire.

The man halted then - sword levelled - and a look of suspicious puzzlement crept into his shadowed blue eyes. His gaze fixed upon the sole occupant of the room: an old man with long white hair and beard. Although living in Karlmain's most famous castle, the man's high-boned and aristocratically cruel face showed him to be a pure-blooded Mongarlaan, as did the clothes he wore: a long robe of watered silk with three-quarter length sleeves, tied with a sash about his waist, and slippers with curling toes. The old man was seated in a high backed leather chair, a glass of wine on a small round table at his elbow. No surprise showed on his face, and a thin but genuine smile hung on his withered lips.

"Ah," he said in a quivering voice, "You will be the young man who seeks my son's life, I'll wager. Would you care for some wine?"

"Your son?" asked the other in a thickly-accented voice, which also betrayed bewilderment.

"Yes - Romikhael Langen, Captain of His Imperial Majesty's Third Dragons. I am Lord Aydran Langen of Chentan. The Emperor allowed me - and my heirs - the use of Castle

Vyrich for services rendered."

"I know. I thought your son would be here."

"He's very rarely here these days. He's gone off to Lativ, for some reason; he rarely tells me why...."

"Then he has not heard of Bresniv's summoning to Mosoar yet?" His tone was eager.

"Not yet - I'm to tell him when he returns. But I'm being a bad host! Do sit down, Comte Talarth, I have no intentions of harming you. Wine?"

Talarth sat in a chair similar to that occupied by Lord Langen. He pulled off his brown hat and ran a hand through his sandy hair wearily. "Wine? But I am your prisoner now!"

"Prisoner?" laughed the old man. "Oh, my dear Comte - on the contrary. You are an honoured guest."

"Guest? Lord - I am here to kill your son...."

"I'm fully aware of your self-appointed task, Comte. Please, relax - take off that heavy coat."

Warily, Talarth slipped off his greatcoat and hung it over the chair's arm. Without the coat, the shirt he wore could be seen to have scalloped sleeves.

Langen studied him carefully. Although the old man judged the other as no older than twenty-two years, the cold eyes, weather-scoured face and partly grown beard added at least ten years to his appearance. Absently, the old man wondered if he had ever been young.

Talarth sat back, but his hands always stayed close to the hilts of his rapier and pistol. "I'll have that wine now. But be careful how you pull that bell-cord - my pistol is fully loaded, and you will be the first to die should I smell any deceit."

Lord Langen's frail hand tugged briefly at a velvet cord. "I assure you that I mean no treachery, Comte - though I understand your distrust. Ah, Jyon," This to a liveried servant who entered and stared bemused at Talarth. "A bottle of port and a glass for Comte vir Sed'Delck." The servant bowed and hurried from the room.

Talarth pulled out his pipe and lit it. He puffed out a cloud of fragrant blue smoke. "Why?" he said briefly.

The old man shrugged. "Many reasons. I knew your father once-- that is one reason. We were at the University of Blendheim together, both reading Literature and Sciences. We were the greatest of friends, for a while; we both had our first girls at the same party, I recall." He smiled fondly at the memory.

"But then his father, your grandfather, died in a boating accident, and he had to return to Sed' Deioik to take over the Comte's estates and title." The lord sighed, just as Jyon entered with a silver tray bearing a decanter of port and lead crystal goblet. He placed it on a small table, like the one at Langen's elbow, and moved it to Talarth's side. He bowed again and left.

The Comte picked up the decanter and, removing the top, he sniffed carefully. His eyebrows lifted in surprise, as he looked up at the old man. "Genuine Mongarlean--I would stake any money on it."

Langen smiled proudly. "I have a cellar full of it-- managed to smuggle it under Laneenovitch's nose when we moved into this castle. I'm glad to be able to share it with a fellow connoisseur."

Talarth poured himself a glassful and sipped in real appreciation. "You knew my father, but that is not any reason for....this...." He waved an arm at the port and room.

"Perhaps. Romikhael is my elder son, and I love him as a father should-- but there are things which I cannot condone. I am a Mongarlean, one of the old school, and I don't like this new Imperialism. Mongarlean and Lativ have always been rivals-- and now I find myself the lord of a castle but a few hundred kilometres west of the damned country. I'm a devout Corunon; but here I am surrounded by heretical followers of that Latvian Storm Giantess whore, Vissana." His voice had taken on an almost fanatical tone. "And now, The Serpent has reappeared, and is leading a religious crusade on Moscar, claiming that Vissana should be the official god of Aysan-- or the Laneenovitch Empire, to be exact."

"The Serpent?" asked Talarth in sudden interest. "So someone's recovered the Golden Blade again?"

Langen looked at him sternly. "If you have any sudden ideas of

using that accursed sword in your quest, I would advise you to forget them. Don't forget that all who claim it as theirs live in fame and fear for a while-- and die painfully one dark night when some other ambitious madman sets his eyes upon it."

Talarth nodded and drained his glass. He refilled it. "You are very concerned about me. Your son needs it more than I."

Langen shook his head. "I have ambitions of my own, Comte. One that seems to coincide with your own in many ways."

"What are they?"

"I want to see the Laneenovitch Empire crushed before it secures too strong a hold on Aysan. Presently only Lativ, Mongarlean, Karlmain and Blendheim are part-- but the time will come when Thaal, Gonrym and Trolaus will be swallowed. Who knows, perhaps he will even send a fleet across the Ocean of Sorrows and conquer the mythical continent of Vanqua."

"If it exists at all...."

"Whether it does or not, I don't want this world to die under the stagnating heel of empire."

Talarth drew his pistol and studied it. "Bresniv will not attack Trolaus-- he fears the power of The Seven too much."

"Yes-- The Seven Wizards of Trolaus. One of whom saved your life."

Talarth's left hand went to his cravat unconsciously.

"A man in favour with The Seven," continued Langen, "is a man who might even destroy an empire." His old eyes blazed.

The Comte laughed cruelly. "Your thoughts run along lines not unlike my own. Yet you would sacrifice your son for this?"

The old man stiffened proudly. "We are an old family, Comte-- and traditions are strict in Mongarlean. If Romikhael has seriously wronged you, his life is yours to take if you wish. Besides, I have other sons."

Talarth was thoughtful. "So-- you deliver your son to me. Can you do the same with Heinam, Mhöt-eyn and Sataen?"

The old man laughed in appreciation of the thought. "I don't have such influence with those gentlemen, I'm afraid-- but I can tell you where to find them."

The other came forward with interest, and his teeth were bared where they clamped tightly over his pipe stem. "Tell me," he hissed.

"At first, Field Commander Mhōteyn was all for getting to Moscar and letting the Imperial Guard deal with you; but then he decided it would be more satisfying to kill you himself. There is a town in Lativ that you would have to pass through on your way to Moscar for rest and feed: Stelgrad."

"I know of it," said Telarth softly. "A routine halt on all the major trade routes."

"Quite so. It was Mhōteyn's idea that Captain Heinam and Sub-Commander Setaen should await you there, along with himself, and kill you when you arrived."

The Comte smiled and eased back the hammer of his pistol. "Then it would be impolite to disappoint them."

Langen's face twisted in angered concern. "Don't be a young fool! Walk straight in and they will kill you where you stand!"

Telarth uncocked the gun. "But none of them have seen me...."

"But tales have preceded you." He waved a bony hand at the Comte. "Two things define you: Your remarkable revolving pistol and that long pale coat. And your accent is also very obvious at times. You will have to lose one of them."

"I have no desire to leave my gun; and I can do nothing about my accent in the time available." He slid the gun back into its holster in a fluid motion.

"Quite so-- it must be the coat." The old man stood, a little unsteadily, and shuffled to a cupboard behind his chair. He opened the wooden door and produced a long woollen riding cloak. It was dark brown with a high collar; a cape was stitched over it and fell in deep vees at the front and back.

"This should give you the warmth you had with the greatcoat - plus anonymity."

Telarth stood and took the cloak, swinging it over his shoulders. The cape reached his waist at back and front, while hanging just above his elbows at the sides. He fastened the clasp and found that the material in no way impaired his drawing of sword or pistol. He looked at the lord and smiled grimly. He relit

his pipe and nodded.

"Perfect," he said.

There was a sudden muffled commotion from outside, and the sound of someone laughing - then climbing the tower's spiral staircase. Telarth glanced sharply at the old man, and noted the resignation in the old, tired eyes.

"My son," said Langen needlessly.

Without a word Telarth spun round and picked up his hat. He opened the door and, as though as an afterthought, looked back at the old man.

"My thanks for the port, my Lord." Then he was gone, as silently as he had come.

Feeling suddenly old and wretched, Lord Langen hobbled to his chair and sat. From below he heard a sudden exclamation and the rasp of a hurriedly drawn sword. There was the briefest flash of steel - then the sounds of a body rolling down the steps.

A tear broke loose, and ran erratically down the old man's wrinkled cheek.

* * *

In the caravan town of Stelgrad, three men sat nervously at a table in the Road's End inn; drinking cups of the local wine. All were dressed in the doublet, hose, silken shirts and high-heeled boots that betokened officers - but one's clothes were especially elaborate. This man had a long face that would have been exceptionally handsome, but for a long scar that crossed his right cheek. His long hair and beard were auburn - and an assured smile played along his thin lips as he ran a finger around the rim of his cup.

"But how can we be sure he'll come?" one was saying; a thin fellow with curled black hair.

Not taking his eyes from his moving finger, the auburn haired one smiled confidently. "He'll come, Setaen - be sure of it."

Setaen frowned at him. "What makes you so certain, commander? Stelgrad is only one of the many towns he could stop over at."

"Not coming from Karlmain - and he's sure to pay our friend Langen a little visit."

The third, a sharp-faced captain with short-cropped, curly brown hair, spat on the floor. "No friend

of mine! Mongarlan bastard!"

The Field Commander laughed.

"Captain Heinam is a little prone to let old racial differences get the better of his judgement, don't you think?"

"You're from Theal, Mhôteyn!" snapped Heinam. "You haven't been at war with Mongarlan for the past three centuries!"

"Neither have you," reasoned Mhôteyn. "Only Lativ. And it's Field Commander Mhôteyn."

Heinam scowled silently.

Sataen drained his cup suddenly and stood. "I'm going back to my room - you two can wait till Doomsday if you wish!" He slammed down his cup and stalked to the stairs.

Taking the steps two at a time, he pulled a key from his doublet. On the first floor he turned down a distempered corridor until he reached his door. He unlocked it and stepped into the barely-furnished room.

"Sataen!"

The soldier whirled, and had time only to see a brown cloak before a dagger slit through both jugular veins, and into his trachea. Silently, his body dropped to the floor - blood jetting from his ruined throat.

Talarth slipped from the room quickly and looked it behind him; then he returned to the tap-room. At the bar he ordered ohé, and carefully watched the two soldiers drinking wine.

As he lifted his cup, he noticed an ugly crimson-brown patch spreading across the near-white ceiling above the officers. The Comte frowned, drained his cup, and reached the street just as the first drop splashed onto Heinam's hand. Someone screamed - but Talarth smiled to himself.

"Jemas?"

He spun about, his rapier singing from its sheath as though by itself. A girl, her eyes filled with sudden fear, stepped back from the unwavering point. She was black-haired and brown eyed, wearing a dress of crimson with wide bustle and stiffened bodice. A feather-covered hat was pinned to her flowing hair.

"Mhagette Hyrâdde?" The sword point did not move, and Talarth's blue eyes blazed with sudden anger.

"So you prostitute yourself to your home's enemies?"

Her eyes fluttered to the ground. "Is that what they say in Sed'Deick?" She raised her eyes again. "Or is that what you say?"

"Either way - I am Sed'Deick's Comte."

The rapier dropped a little.

"Nyi - but I do not understand its lack of reason." He sheathed his sword with a flick of his wrist, his cloak swirled - and he was walking away.

"Jemas!" The girl ran after him. He whirled and grabbed her wrists tightly so that she gasped in pain.

"If you want either of us to continue living," he snarled, his face close to hers, "I suggest you use my name a little less freely - or more quietly!" He dropped her arm.

She drew in breath sharply, staring about her. From a few latticed windows, curious faces peered out at them.

"You are mad, Jemas," she whispered.

The Comte said nothing, but turned and resumed his walk down the filthy cobbles.

* * *

The Visanan priest looked up as the two officers entered his church. They walked towards the altar, feathered caps held respectfully in their hands. They bowed to the image of the Storm Giant's Queen when they reached the altar rail, and knelt.

"Well, my sons?" asked the priest. No officers of the Imperial Army came in humility to Visana unless they wanted something.

"There is a heretic in Stelgrad, Father," said the first, a Field Commander. "He seeks both our lives, and the life of the Emperor...."

"And you wish Her help? For the heretic? Or for the Emperor - who is a Corunan, I believe?"

"For us, Father!" snapped the second, a captain. "We are both Visanans...."

"Indeed? Well, prayers and offerings have been known to sway the gods, and...." He paused as the first produced a heavy purse. "And I am certain She will not desert Her faithful in their hours of need."

Mhôteyn smiled gratefully.

"I thought as much, Father."

The red sun was only a degree or so above the horizon as Talarth stood watching the entrance to the Road's End, leaning idly against the plastered corner of a building across the street from the inn. He oohed the stem of his pipe thoughtfully, although it had long since gone out.

The Comte stiffened suddenly, his eyes narrowing, as a man in the uniform of a captain came out of the doorway, and turned towards him. As he came abreast, Talarth levelled his carbine, ready-cooked, and fired. The echoes had scarcely died before he was standing over the shattered corpse.

"Damn!" he swore suddenly. Even though most of the head had been blown away, Talarth saw that this was not Heinam. Drawing his pistol, cocking it, he turned, cat-like, and saw the real Captain Tyrnis Heinam advancing towards him, carbine levelled. A mocking grin played over the Latvian's face as he came closer.

"Made a small mistake, didn't you, Comte. Put down your pistol, now!"

Talarth's only move was to bring his gun level with Heinam's forehead. A little of the other's confidence ebbed away; he waved his carbine.

"I mean it, Talarth. At this range, even a novice could hit you with a carbine."

"But the hang-fire on a long-arm is appreciably longer than a pistol's," said Talarth quietly. His eye caught a faint movement in the gables above him as another figure - a common musketeer, probably - moved into position. "Do you feel that lucky?"

"Drop it!" screamed Heinam. Simultaneously, they both pulled their triggers.

Heinam's body was already falling - its face blown away - when his weapon discharged uselessly into the air. Not pausing to think, Talarth threw himself sideways, pulling back his gun's hammer - as a ball shattered the cobbles where he had been standing. He fired at the gables, and was satisfied by a cry of pain - and the sight of a body falling to earth.

"Very well done, Comte."

Talarth turned to face the voice with calculated slowness. Standing about twenty metres away was Mhōteyn, a long-barrelled pistol in his hand. At his side pulsed a glowing thing that cast an eerie light over the Field Commander.

Talarth narrowed his eyes, trying to make out the thing more clearly - but he could only see a shapeless core of brighter light. Mhōteyn laughed.

"It's from the dying swamps, south of Mosoar; so I'm told. And it's quite immune to steel and lead, I assure you. Goodbye, Comte."

He stepped aside, and the glowing thing flashed more brightly, rearing to twice the Comte's height. It let out a haunting shriek, and flowed directly towards Talarth. The Comte sheathed his pistol and drew his rapier. Without a sound, he attacked the creature.

His sword's blade passed through the creature's substance without harming it at all. A glowing tendril pulsed from the central core and touched the Comte's body. He howled as soul-searing cold flowed into his heart. Like the swamps that spawned it - the thing drew on others' vitality to survive.

Talarth threw himself back, and the deadly cold ceased. Another tendril flowed towards him, and he dodged it fearfully - almost running into the first. Tendrils began to grow from the creature in vast numbers; writhing over the cobbles, flowing through the air. The Comte was continually avoiding the luminous shapes now. He felt fear.

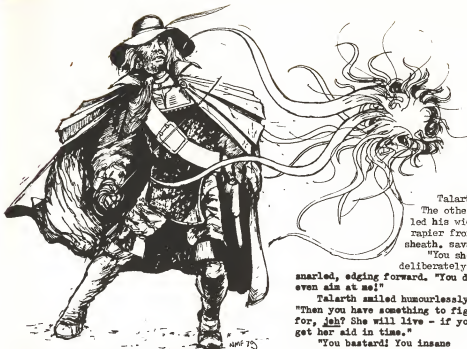
He struck at the tendrils wildly with his rapier - but the steel simply passed through like they were smoke. A tendril touched his arm, and he fell to the street to avoid the cold - but he knew he was dead.

Then a strange humming seemed to fill the twilight air. The Comte recognised with awe an almost soundless chant in the Old Trolsaus tongue - used only by The Seven.

Thy pistol, went the chant. Thy pistol: built by magic, is more than it appears. Thy pistol.

With a wild yell, Talarth drew the pistol, cocked it, and fired.

There was an explosion. The thing shrieked, and seemed to be dissipating into the air itself.



The pistol ball had blown up into a scarlet fire that burned within the thing's core.

There was another dull concussion, and the glowing thing wailed mournfully before disappearing totally. Mhôteyn stood, fear and amazement on his face, exactly where he had been before. Talarth stood up, raising his pistol, and the almost soundless chanting ceased.

"I have one shot left, Mhôteyn," he said calmly. "The range is a little extreme - but it will have to suffice."

The other levelled his own gun, snarling wordlessly.

Silence fell and deepened as the two men stared into each other's face, trying to judge when the other would fire - each waiting for the other to break first.

"Stanislav! Jemas!" Out of the corner of his eye, the Comte could see Mhagette running towards them, behind Mhôteyn.

"Please - stop!"

Both men fired. Talarth felt the pain of Mhôteyn's shot tearing past his arm even as he pulled out his rapier. He advanced on the soldier, who was staring bemused at the prostrate figure of Mhagette lying on the crimson cobbles, her arm pulped.

"Your sword, Mhôteyn!" hissed

Talarth.
The other pulled his wide-bladed rapier from its sheath, savagely.
"You shot her deliberately!" he

snarled, edging forward. "You didn't even aim at me!"

Talarth smiled humourlessly. "Then you have something to fight for, *leh*? She will live - if you get her aid in time."

"You bastard! You insane bastard!"

"On your guard, Mhôteyn." Talarth lunged suddenly, nicking the soldier's cheek. Mhôteyn yelled wordlessly, returning the thrust. With a contemptuous twist of his blade, the Comte parried, and ran the Field Commander through the heart. He plucked out the blade, and kicked the body to the ground.

Talarth ripped off a long strip of Mhôteyn's shirt, and began to bind his arm, walking over to Mhagette's body. She was still living, and pain-filled eyes stared up at him imploringly.

"Help me, Jemas," she whispered. "I'll bleed to death if I don't get help soon."

A sneer curled the Comte's lip as he thought of a boy, three years ago, begging the same of six Imperial officers.

"Ask your Laneenovitch friends," he spat. "You lost all claim to life the day you left with that." He pointed to the corpse a little way up the street.

Then, with no more thought of the girl, Comte Jemas Talarth *vir Sed* Deick sheathed his rapier, picked up his wheel-look carbine and walked away down the street.

From suddenly opened windows, a frightened populace looked down on four corpses - and one dying girl.

To Wake The Dead

Though she was watching, the night crept up on her. Before she knew it the sky was extinguished. All of a sudden, now that it was too late, she didn't want to go.

From her bedroom window she could see the water tower which stood at the top of the hill, and which consisted largely of tall arches. She and her friends often played beneath the arches, which made her think of a deserted cathedral. But now they resembled a looming crowd of legs, between which were trapped a last few scrawny glimpses of daylight. The body of the tower hovered above the light, as a spider stands over a wrapped fly. If the night could change the tower so much, what would it do to the house?

If only she could plead she had homework to do - some school project which she needed to research! The spines of her encyclopaedias offered her fragments of words, but none of them inspired her. Besides, Wendy would know she was lying.

Perhaps Wendy wouldn't come; perhaps she would be ill, too ill to leave the house. What a spiteful wish! A little ashamed, though not so much so as to cease wishing, the girl searched her room for excuses. There was nothing. Sandwiched in its case, her tennis racket leaned against the wall; a neat stack of The Young Elizabethan, the young persons' magazine, grew in one corner; Elvis Presley gazed down from above

her bed, his hair shining like oil, with a sidelong knowing sneer. He looked smug and unhelpful, like everything else in her room. "You're no help, are you? No help whatsoever," she added, for she was fond of that adjective - and the doorbell rang.

Though the jerking of her heart made her chest ache, she didn't go to the door. It might be a friend of her parents. She gazed at her coat, which she'd laid out, ready. Had she time to replace it in the wardrobe, to wish Wendy away?

Downstairs, a snatch of an opera drifted into the hall - The Magic Flute, she thought it was. She heard her mother's footsteps, the click of the front door, her mother's greeting: "Oh, hello." For heaven's sake let them make clear who it was! Her hands felt hot and swollen, prickly with nerves. Her Mother called "Wendy's here."

She buttoned her coat so slowly that her mother raised her voice: "Did you hear me? I said Wendy's here." From the top of the stairs she heard her mother saying "Look after her, Wendy, won't you. I don't mean she isn't sensible, but she is only ten, and she might get over-excited."

Her father glanced up as she ventured downstairs. He hung back in the doorway, afraid to lose the opera. "You're away, then. What is this film, did you say? Look Around the Clock?" He knew perfectly well, but meant to imply that it wasn't worth knowing. "Well, you must go if you feel you should. Still, I'm surprised that it interests you. I think you may be disappointed. Well, you must find out for yourself."

Couldn't he tell it was a lie? Just because she thought Elvis was sexy didn't mean she wanted to watch fat Bill Haley sing three notes. For a moment

she might have saved herself from her fears by telling the truth, except that she was afraid to admit the lie. Her moist hands squirmed, suffocated by her pockets. Resentment gagged her. How dare anyone suggest she was less grown-up than Wendy!

"Hurry back, then," her mother said, suppressing anxiety. "Keep to the main road."

The night was icy. The girl felt her bare knees burn with the cold. A breeze wafted Wendy's scent from beneath her pink coat; in the orange glare of the infrequent streetlamps, her eyes looked bruised with makeup. By comparison, the younger girl was dressed childishly, which made her feel both irritable and vulnerable.

At the foot of the sloping pavement they reached the main road. Chris's Fish & Chips was open; people stood outside, gingerly opening newspaper packages as though they contained fragile gifts; steam from the packages mixed with white clouds of breath. "Shall we get some chips?" Wendy said.

Was that meant to delay them? She wasn't dressed for chips. "No, I shouldn't," she answered herself at once. "I'll get fat."

After that, as they trudged toward town, she was silent - but the girl had sensed that she'd had second thoughts about their escapade. Then let her say so - the girl wasn't going to admit to her fears before Wendy did so.

The main road was glaring. It reminded her of the stasis before a storm, when sunlit houses against blackening clouds looked ominous, unreal, unfamiliar. Everything was benighted, even the hospital, a chummy gathering of buildings which resembled cottages, apartment blocks, a village hall, a barracks. The many lighted windows were blank.

Two nurses crossed the drive. Their purposeful march reminded her of nuns. If only they would stop her, ask her where she was going! But they burst into laughter and vanished into the hospital, leaving her alone with Wendy's footsteps and

her own, with the repetitive brushing of Wendy's knees against her calf-length skirt, with her fears.

What exactly was there to fear? She had seen death before. She'd crept into her grandmother's room to whisper goodnight, though she had been told not to disturb her, only to find that she seemed to be more soundly asleep than whispers could penetrate, her fretted lips gaping in a silent snore. Although the girl had run crying for her mother, she hadn't been actually frightened; and despite her parents' distress, they'd seemed on the whole glad that she had seen. Why should she be frightened now?

Queues of cars passed each other, like trains on adjacent lines; the road was too narrow for overtaking. Their scoops of light caught dust, petrol fumes, a moth. Shortly the road was deserted again. Ahead the tarmac gleamed bleakly. She felt far too close to the house. "What do you think we're going to do?" she said uneasily.

"Oh, just sit around a table, I expect, like they did in that story." Wendy sounded glad to talk. "Or maybe Richard will sit there with a pencil and see if it writes anything. I expect it'll write something stupid, if he has anything to do with it. You know what Richard's like."

Yes: last year Richard had sworn that the girl's body which had been dug up outside town was newly murdered, when in fact she was fifty years dead. Why should they believe his latest tale? His next-door neighbour had died recently, but only Richard insisted he had been crying for help. Could he really have distinguished words through the dividing wall? Anyway, that had been months ago. The dead man's house had an unpleasant reputation, but nobody seemed to know anything specific - at least, anything they would tell children. Perhaps the vague rumours had given Richard the idea for his latest horror fib.

The two girls were approaching the town. Houses and

gardens were dwindling, sometimes into terraces of cottages. Glimpses of bright rooms - warm, impragnable, aloof from her - reminded the girl of home. One last secret charm reassured her a little: as long as she stayed on this pavement, on the far side of the road from the house, she might be saved.

They passed the pale squat unlit hall, the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. Next to it, behind the Windmill pub, hens clucked sleepily. It was a comfortable sound, but by no means encouraging, for it meant that they had reached the terrace which contained the house.

Beyond the terrace, people sat morosely on a bench outside the bus station. Further on, Dirsaeli stood on a pedestal, ignoring the traffic lights beneath him, which were stepping down to green. There was safety: far too distant. Wendy had already crossed to the opposite pavement, had braved the short path beside the lit bay window and was ringing the bell.

A red bus blocked the girl's view. Its windows displayed seated figures, motionless in slabs of light like amber; none of them noticed her. Glowing splashes trailed over the pavement, over the shiny blunt toe-caps of her shoes. Then the bus was past, and Richard stood in the doorway of the house.

When he saw her, he frowned. "Well, what's she waiting for? Does she want crossing over?"

She wasn't a baby, she thought fiercely. She was more mature than Wendy, grown-ups had told her so. Nothing would happen at the seance, except for Richard's tricks. It would simply be what she's hoped for: an initiation into Wendy's world of adolescence. Taking a breath so deep it seemed to bruise her chest, she crossed the deserted roadway. Determined not to look at the dark uncurtained bay of the next house, she strode into the lighted hall.

The living-room seemed crowded with people, sitting on a plump, though somewhat faded suite. In fact there were only

five people, but all of them were staring at her as though she had no right to be there. A boy whose chin sprouted a few unequal hairs complained "She's rather young for this, isn't she?"

"Oh, she's all right. Leave her alone." Wendy sounded both annoyed by the reflection on her judgement and a little embarrassed; perhaps, deep down, she agreed.

Richard stood between chairs in the bay, peering out through a crack in the curtains. A boy with hair like Elvis and a reasonably even moustache said "Is that everyone?"

"No, there's Ken. He has to come from near the Comrades of the Great War Club."

Glancing at the moustached boy, Wendy brightened. "I didn't know you were coming."

"Who, me? I wouldn't have missed it for anything." He patted the arm of his chair, as though to make a dog jump. "Besides, you might need looking after."

The younger girl thought him pompous and conceited, and a very bad substitute for Elvis. After a token protest at the way he summoned her, Wendy sat beside him. She had withdrawn into the adolescent world, where people seemed to do things which they didn't want to do and which, when they did them, they didn't enjoy. The girl felt excluded, barely tolerated by the group. She sat on the couch, beside two girls who ignored her. She wished she hadn't come.

Did Richard want to scare her? He was looking at her as he said "I heard something else today."

"What?" one of the girls demanded nervously.

"I don't know. It sounded like - " Was he pausing for effect, or choosing his words? "It sounded like someone ill trying to get hold of things, groping about next door, trying to pick something up."

He leaned against the chipped mantelpiece and gazed at his listeners. He was obviously

enjoying himself, but was he lying? He must have heard mice, the young girl told herself. But she was struggling to gain sufficient courage to say that she'd decided not to go into the house.

The doorbell rang. Everyone started, then pretended that they hadn't, or giggled uneasily. "Stupid," one girl snarled - it wasn't clear to whom. Had Richard's parents returned unexpectedly? Oh, please let it be - But he returned from the front door to announce "All right, it's time. Ken's here."

He led them out of the house. Between it and its neighbour was an arched tunnel, narrower than the stretch of the young girl's arms. The edge of headlights on the road withdrew from the passage, which was at once very dark. The girl's footsteps rang shrilly between the walls, mocking her nervousness.

At the end of the passage were the doors to two back yards. Richard pushed one, which tottered open, scraping over stone. Beyond it the kitchen of the deserted house protruded into the yard, toward a large coal-shed. There was room for little else except darkness thick as mud and, in one corner of the yard, an anonymous shrub, starved and restless.

As they crept into the yard eyes gleamed at them from the coal, which scattered rattling as the awakened sleeper leapt on the wall and fled, mewling. "Shut up," Richard hissed at gigglee. He was fiddling with the back door of the house. He must be copying a film, he couldn't know how to do it properly. There came a snap of metal; he must have broken his knife. The girl relaxed, only just suppressing an audible sigh - then saw that the door was open.

Richard's flashlight reached into the darkness. It spread over the flags of the kitchen floor, dimming. Wooden legs with knobbly ankles stood in the shadow; deep in the

darkness, something gurgled moistly. "Well, keep up," he said irritably to the others as he stepped within.

The young girl tried to keep up with Wendy, who was clinging to the moustached boy. As the flashlight swung to make sure everyone had followed, a nervous drip glinted on the lip of a tap. The drip was trembling, ready to fall. It must have been the tap which had gurgled. "Shut the door," Richard ordered.

Beyond the kitchen was a larger room. The patch of light crawled over the floor, picking at the pattern of the carpet, leaving it incomplete. Why couldn't Richard raise the torch-beam? Nobody could see so far into the house from the road. In the unlit room draped chairs loomed, squatting fatly beneath their shrouds. The air smelled of hovering dust.

As they ventured into the hall, a thin silhouette sprang up to meet them. A sharp hook of panic snagged the girl's heart. Everyone halted, gasping or swearing, except Richard. In a moment they were scoffing and jostling, for it had only been the cross that separated the front-door panees, outlined by headlights. But the girl had felt caged by their panic. As they'd surrounded her, instinctively huddling together, they had seemed capable of crushing her among them. They and their indifference dwarfed her. Her fear was bigger than she was.

"Keep it quiet," Richard muttered, and padded upstairs. His light doled out a couple of stairs at a time. Shadows tugged at the bannisters, which shifted creaking beneath her hand. Nervousness and dusty breaths parched her throat; underfoot, the unseen carpet felt like a thick wad of dust. She was trapped in the midst of the uneasy procession. She could only etumble upstairs.

All the doors on the landing were ajar. As the light wavered into the rooms, they looked impossibly large with darkness, which seemed less still than it ought to be.

Carpet muffled the creaks of the landing. How could the answering creaks - surely they must be echoes - sound clearer in the room? This seemed not to



trouble Richard, who strode stealthily into the front bedroom.

He switched off the flash-light. A streetlamp lit the room, though only through two cramped windows. An indeterminate pattern swarmed on the wallpaper. As the others pushed her through the doorway she saw a large table which seemed not to belong to the room, surrounded by a dim bed, a dressing-table, a couple of chairs; rough square of paper laid around the table's edge spelled out the alphabet - "Don't shut that door!" Richard hissed urgently.

He tugged a drawer out of the dressing-table and propped the door open. "No handle on the inside," he explained, amused by their muffled dismay or suspicion. "Come on then, before my parents get back."

"Right," Richard said triumphantly. "Now." From beside the dressing-table he produced

an object like a home-made wooden roller-skate, whose wheels were capable of veering. His gesture expected a reaction, and received one: strangled laughter, nudging, giggling. "He's going to write with his feet," someone eniggered. The girl joined in the almost hysterical mirth, though she felt the shrillness of her laughter excluded her from the group.

"Shut up!" Richard said savagely. "Do you want someone to hear us and call the police?"

They subsided gradually into silence. There was an interlude of subdued jostling as they each placed one hand on the skate in the centre of the table. "Now what?" demanded the whispy boy.

"We wait," Richard said.

They did so, more or less silently. "My arm's going to sleep," one girl muttered. "So am I," complained her friend. Minutes after they had spoken,

their words remained, hovering as though the air had grown stagnant. The room seemed to be darkening, as if with the approach of a storm - the young girl's eyes must be tired, that was all. Headlights trailed over the ceiling and dragged at the pattern of the wallpaper, which shifted slyly. No light reached the ajar door, beyond which stood blackness. She imagined how much of the dark house she would have to brave to escape.

Boredom or unease was growing. "How long are we going to have to sit?" protested the whippy boy. Free hands were exploring. "Oh, get off," one girl cried furiously.

"I don't think this is going to work," said the boy with the moustache. "The planchette's too heavy. You need something lighter."

At once, accompanied by an odd sound which seemed to come from deep in the house, the wooden skate began to quest toward the edge of the table, advancing and recoiling like a trapped rat.

"Of course if you're going to make it move -"

"I'm not doing it," said Richard resentfully.

"Well, somebody must be." He gazed at each of them in turn. She noticed that his moustache was glistening: with sweat? Nothing he saw in their eyes seemed to please him. "Well, it's certainly not me," he said as though denying a bad smell.

The skate faltered and was still. Richard was glaring - because of the interruption, or because he had ceased to be the leader? "Are we just going to sit here and argue?" he demanded.

"We're supposed to ask questions. What was the name of the fellow who died here?"

"Allen. Mr Allen."

"All right." The moustached boy sat forward like an executive at a conference; perhaps he was imitating a film. "We'll see if it's him." Slowly and loudly, as though addressing a retarded child, he asked the skate "Are

you Mr Allen?"

He was answered at once, by stifled giggles. He permitted himself a faint smile: the joke was really too childish for him. Only Richard held himself solemn, furiously so. The girl restrained herself from giggling more loudly than the others. Why was she afraid to draw attention to herself? Because the room was so dim?

Again she heard the faint sound, which was perhaps not so deep in the house, after all: a feeble restlessness. A mouse? No, it must be the noise of the skate, made to sound distant by the oppressive atmosphere - for the skate was moving. It turned purposefully and went straight to a square of paper, where it halted.

That seemed comfortingly meaningless. One letter could tell them nothing. Then the girl saw that two additional squares interrupted the alphabet, on opposite sides of the table: YES and NO. NO, the skate had said.

No, it was not Mr Allen who was advancing through the house, making doors squeak in the downstairs hall and now on the landing. It must be only a draught. But it was not Mr Allen who had come into the room, whose feeble restlessness was clearly audible now, though its position was obscure. Richard's head turned, searching. Reluctantly he said "That's what I heard."

Now the sound was more definable. Yes, it was like someone very old or very ill fumbling about in the dark - except that just as she was close to locating it in one part of the room, it seemed to reappear elsewhere. Her fingers on the skate were paralyzed, they felt glued together by sweat, but they were trembling. Neither her hand nor the rest of her body could do anything about her panic.

Perhaps everyone was waiting for somebody else to be the first to flee. Before anyone could move, the skate began turning. Though their arms were heavy with exhaustion and

nerves, it was quicker now, more efficient. I AM, it spelled rapidly.

The moustached boy sat forward, awaiting the rest of the message. His free hand wiped his glistening moustache. The others watched unwillingly as the skate dragged their hands about the table. When it had finished they sat stiffly, not daring to remark on the message in case that lent it power. Only the moustached boy mouthed it silently, frowning: I AM EVERYWHERE IN HERE.

"I think we'd better go," stammered the wispy boy. His last word sprang into falsetto, but nobody laughed. Nor did anyone move, for the formless sounds were groping around the room, hemming them in. Headlamps slipped rectangles of light into the room; the rectangles turned into gliding parallelograms and vanished. The girl kept her gaze away from the light, for it might make the source of the groping visible.

The skate darted into the centre again, and dodged about the table. Its swiftness seemed almost gleeful. One of the girls was sobbing dryly and incessantly; it sounded as though she was choking. The skate picked out its message deftly, then rested beneath the crowd of their fingertips. DO AS YOU'RE TOLD, it had said.

A wave of resentment, violent as electricity, flashed through the group. "Fuck that," said Ken, whom the young girl had yet to hear speak. His voice proved to be high and thin, unsuited to the protest; it breathed out beer, the smell of bravado. His chair creaked as he made to get up. The sobbing girl managed to gulp herself space between sobs for words, to cry "Don't let go!"

Perhaps she believed that while the presence was occupied in spelling messages it would be unable to do worse. And indeed, the sound of unlocated fumbling had ceased - but the young girl felt it had only come to rest. She thought she could hear the faintest of shiftings, like the movements

which betray the serenity of a cat as it prepares to leap on its prey. She dared not look.

In any case, she had to watch the skate, for it was darting urgently about the table. Their fingertips clung to it as though it was their sole protection from the dark. Before the message had ended, the girl was seized by a fit of trembling. Everyone stared at the table, unwilling to meet anyone else's eyes. She felt as though her hand was trying to shake her body to pieces. The message was expanding in her mind, like an after-image in sudden and absolute darkness.

ALL EXCEPT ONE GO OUT.

"Oh, that's too fucking much," Ken protested. "That's just fucking stupid." He was speaking at the top of his voice - to impress them, or himself, or someone else entirely? His piping voice was scrawny in the dark. Nevertheless Richard, at whom he was staring, turned defensive. "I didn't make it say that," he retorted. "I'd have said who the one had to be, wouldn't I?"

At once, as though it had been waiting for his cue, the skate pounced. It rushed towards the bed, sweeping letters to the floor, jerking their arms with such force that Wendy fell against the young girl. Wendy began shuddering as though with fever - for the skate was pointing straight at her.

"No," Wendy cried. "I won't. I won't." She sounded hardly able to form the words. She managed to stumble to her feet, and fled towards the landing. The young girl struggled away from the wispy boy, who shook himself impatiently free of her.

As she sat up, regaining the place from which Wendy had elbowed her, she realized that the skate was pointing directly at her.

Wendy's flight had released the others. They retreated from the table as though it was diseased. None of them glanced at the young girl; indeed, they seemed to have forgotten her - for in their haste they shoved the table against her, knocking



her back on the bed.

The bed was not empty. As she fell back, she glimpsed a face upturned on the pillow. A convulsion seized her whole body; she arched upwards, straining her spine - anything rather than touch what lay in the bed. Was the face an accident of shadows on the lumpy pillow? Perhaps, for as she wrenched her neck in peering wildly, she saw that the face was incomplete. But as her hand tried to lever her away from the bed it touched, through the bedclothes, a thin yet flabby limb.

She heard someone stumble over the drawer in the doorway and kick it aside. The door slammed. "Hey, Richard," said the muffled voice of the whispy boy, "did you realize we've left that kid in there? Was she supposed to be the one?" Several of them giggled, relieved; perhaps they had known

they were shutting her in.

She kicked the table away and ran blindly to the door. Her gasp of terror had hurt her chest, leaving her no breath with which to cry out. She heard Wendy from what seemed a great distance. "You haven't really left her in there, have you? You silly fool, she's only a kid! I'm supposed to be looking after her!"

"All right. Calm down." It was the voice of the moustache. "The door isn't locked, is it? She braver than half you people, anyway. I didn't hear her whining." The handle of the door rattled. There was a thud, and a silence.

When he spoke again his voice was low with anger. "What sort of games are you playing, Richard? The handle's come out and the door won't budge."

The dark closed around the

young girl, like the embrace of fever. The door shook as shoulders thumped it, but held. Now the babble of angry voices was retreating from her. Was Richard calling "It's all right, don't fret, I'll get you something"? The voices faded down the stairs, leaving her alone with silence.

It was not quite silence. Behind her, something dropped softly to the floor. She could neither turn nor cry out, but she knew without turning what the sound was; the fall of the bedclothes. Had something else

got down from the bed?

She could move her hand now. She hooked her finger in the hole where the door-handle ought to be. She dragged at the door, though her hand was trembling so violently that it threatened to jerk out of the hole, but it was no use; the door refused to budge. Now she was trapped there, unable to let go of the door, held fast by the dark as though it was a mareh. She was not even able to scream when the moist cold hands, which were soft as putty, seized her.

The Winter Gods

Forbidden harmony,
Insensible profanity;
Ageless formless gods of dark -
Dark faces through dark windows,
Bleeding poisons, warm anxiety.
Frosted eyes of cold obscurity
Blink and question
With sad lucidity;
Arms of bone; ivy and phosphorus -
Gleaming seconds of boundless morbidity -
Time grins.
There are no paths nor roadways to extinction -
The iced forms of gods stand waiting,
The black mouths of gods move, forming,
And whispers drip like dew from lips -
Creeping, weaving - intolerable waiting;
Slinking sounds of nearing footsteps -
Melting walls, molten towers -
Sparkling fires of black infinity.
Waters from wells seethe and sparkle,
The darkness of night grows thickly spreading -
Eyes peer through tangled forests,
Huge hills swell with bodies,
Old men creep through doorways -
Twisted faces, mis-shapen faces,
Old and leprous, grey cracked faces;
Limping figures,
Crusted years.
The girl weeps tears of fortune,
Her hair glistens, sparkles, flares -
The ancient songs but half-forgotten
Sound from rooms above the walls.
The ancient lady moving slowly,
The wasting man caressing the stairway,
All below; and ageless greetings -
Fluttering soundless across the hedgegroves;
Come silently.
Bend fleetingly.
The whispering trees
Bend in strange
Forbidden harmony.
Coldly, aimlessly - the dark gods rise.

phil
williams

YOU...

Dear Eds,

It's a pity that we see the growth in John Heron's editorship of DARK HORIZONS as he in fact leaves the magazine. DH19 would, contents-wise, have been as John envisaged, but let us gratefully note that Mike Chinn and John Merritt took on the project and rushed an issue out after considerable delay already suffered. Therefore, little editorial 'presence' features in DH19, though I suspect that things could become very lively later on!

So this issue: Balanced certainly, but patchy in places. THE BOOKSELLER OF BROADOAK by Mark Clay is faintly amusing, but the construction of the story needed some attention I thought. As it stands, it reads rather stuntedly in places. On the other hand, Ken Cowley's SECOND CHANCE is a delight to read, smoothly and convincingly written. A clever tale. Barry Banks's illustration is good, but reminds me of those illustrations one sees in women's magazines, which makes me nervous! (And, no, I do not read women's magazines!). Broadoak's illustrator, Russ Nicholson, is adept, but this is not anywhere near as good as his best work.

Mike Barrett, with whom I have collaborated on an article on Brian Lumley (featured in a previous DH), can be relied upon to turn out an interesting, if not thoroughly in depth, article. His CREATIONS OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS was useful to me because Zelazny is a writer I've not pursued much. I assume the fan of Zelazny would want something more meaty. However, this kind of introductory article is ideal for the HFS and its members and I hope the two editors can encourage more of the same on other fantasy authors.

The irrepressible Steve Jones gives us a neat little interview with a SF writer, THE SPACE MERCHANT. The interview is nicely set off with book jacket reproductions and the item as a whole must usefully divert the attention of strictly fantasy fans towards the SF field. Me, I've been through a SF spree, before I got into fantasy (beginning in 1962), though again. Frederick Pohl is one of the SF giants I read rather little of, perhaps three novels, including THE SPACE MERCHANTS and DRUMKARD'S WALK. The Pohl item showed that the Zelazny was much in need of illustration - book covers of course - but

now that our two 'new boys' have more time on their hands, maybe future issues will improve pictorially.

Adrian Cole's column, 'TALKING POINT', is punctuated, I see, by a masterpiece from the pen of 'Frank Forletta' - depicting a superweapon no doubt. I'm sure it'll do nothing for Mary Whitehouse... but perhaps it should! I tend to agree with Adrian that the current tirade against Tolkien in favour of the more contemporary exponents is a little silly. And, as he says, Donaldson abhors the idea that he is thought better than LOTR and even more reverently spoken of. I was personally pleased to find THE CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVARIANT a more moving book than LOTR, however enjoyable the Rings trilogy was. But I suspect that we have to face the fact that the new 'heroes' of fantasy literature will always be hailed, to the detriment of their precursors. Look at William Morris, one of our founders certainly, but who today is considered wishy-washy. Time does not always treat an author well, but I feel it must be true that Morris, Tolkien and Donaldson all have their places even now.

I like the cover - different to the ones we've been having lately and certainly better than on some recent issues. I also like Mike Chinn's new Roger Dean inspired logo. I dislike the lack of capital first letters in the articles and story headings and the contributors' names. Typing errors must be further eliminated - spelling errors are niggling and are unprofessional (though judging by the typesetting in the Birmingham Evening Mail, the opposite is true!) DH19, put together in two weeks is remarkable and is worthy of praise. I'm sagerly awaiting issue 20!

Yours,

David Sutton
(Kings Heath)

Hello Eds,

DH 19 was by far the best edition of Dark Horizons I have yet seen. At last it has managed to broaden its thinking to cover the whole of fantasy and not just the small sub-set of horror/weird fiction.

Mike Barrett has excellent taste but his examination of Zelazny was more panegyric than analytical. Too much praise and plot summary. I feel he has skirted the issue of Zelazny's recent lapse in writing standards: I refer to the entertainingly

trivial DOORWAYS IN THE SAND and the hardened bot-boiler BRIDGE OF ASHES.

I further contest that Zelazny's earliest writings were flared by a simplicity and shallowness of imagination, something not uncommon in all 60s fantasy (ESP). A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTAS is very touching but it is vaguely cardboardish, even unconvincing. LORD OF LIGHT opened the beginning of Zelazny's career as a truly magnificent writer, but I believe he has matured since then, and the AMBER series represents a significant advancement on LORD OF LIGHT. (By the way, I do not believe books 3 and 4 can be read independantly!). Finally, DEUS IRAE was a hauntingly fascinating novel. The ambience of style matched the dream-like post-holocaust world. I believe it is the best thing Dick has ever written because it so totally encapsulates the mans philosophys. I maintain that Zelazny's presence is minimal when it comes to the philosophy/ideative content.

Adrian Cole's tastes are more dubious. Susan Cooper writes good children's books but Anne Rice's INTERVIEW has had very mixed reactions. He wonders "where does idle opinion finish and useful criticism begin?" His next paragraph is, with respect, idle opinion. Most curious.

The Pohl interview was fascinating. If anything I'd have liked more of it. (I'm not sure what point there is in reproducing the covers of books not directly relevant to the text eg. IN THE PROBLEM PPT, THE BEST OF FREDERICK POHL etc ...).

May I re-uterate my pleasure at fording a broader outlook in DH, and a better balance between fiction and articles (the latter has often been lacking).

Good luck and congratulations!

Phil Rosenblum
(Sydney
AUSTRALIA)





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